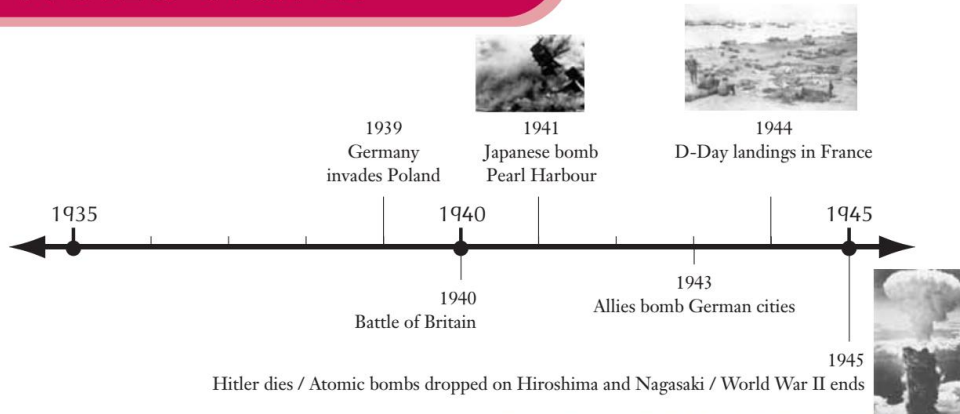


World War II



Adolf Hitler

In 1932, the Nazi party, led by Adolf Hitler, won the general election in Germany. Hitler became Chancellor of Germany in 1933. He called himself the Fuhrer (leader) of the German people and it quickly became clear he was determined to act as a dictator.

Hitler's main aims were:

- To make the Germans the most powerful race of people in Europe.
- To conquer other countries in Europe.
- To create a great German Empire.



Background to the war

In the 1920s and 1930s, Germany had many social problems. There was high unemployment and people were very unhappy with the way the country was being governed. When Hitler and the Nazis came to power, they promised to make Germany a successful, strong and respected nation once again. Hitler decided that the best way to do this was to conquer neighbouring countries, take over their industries and give Germans more land on which to live.



Strand Unit: Eras of change and conflict – World War II.

92 Objective: In this chapter, children will come to understand the destructive nature of war and will empathise with the people who suffered, particularly the Jews.

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First of all though, he turned his attention to those groups of people he disliked. Communists, gypsies and in particular Jews were about to find out that their new leader did not include them in his plans for a new Germany. Hitler had a strong hatred of Jews. He was anti-Semitic. He believed the Jewish people were not competent to be part of the new, strong, powerful Germany he wanted to create. He did not immediately try to expel or harm the Jews. At first, he felt it was sufficient to force them to live in certain areas and wear a gold star on their clothes so that everybody would know that they were Jews.

Jews quickly realised that Hitler did not want them in Germany. Many became afraid that he would use any means necessary to get rid of them.

These people were right to be afraid. Hitler soon decided that those who had not already fled the country after he became Fuhrer must now be eliminated.



Jewish people



Star of David



In 1938, Hitler took over Austria. Some Austrians protested but many others welcomed the union with Germany as they believed Hitler could make their country wealthy and successful.

By early 1939, he had conquered Czechoslovakia. Other countries in Europe became increasingly alarmed. They were concerned as to where Hitler would attempt to conquer next. The British and French distrusted Hitler. They were aware Poland was next on his list of countries to conquer. The leaders of Britain and France announced that if Hitler invaded Poland, they would go to war with Germany. They hoped this would scare Hitler and prevent any further invasions.



German soldiers on the march

On 1 September 1939, Hitler sent his army into Poland. Britain and France kept their promise and declared war on Germany. World War II had commenced.

Eight other countries, including Italy and Japan, decided to side with Germany. These countries became known as the **Axis Powers**. Many historians believe these countries were driven by a desire to **annex** more land and gain more power, even if this was at the expense of their closest neighbours.

Fifty countries fought against Germany, including Britain, France, Russia, Canada, Australia and the United States of America (America). They did not all go to war at the same time – some countries, such as America, joined the war later; others, such as Britain, were involved from the very beginning. These fifty countries who fought against the Nazis became known as the **Allies**.



Some Austrians welcomed the Nazi invasion of their country



German soldiers murder civilian prisoners in Latvia

Activity **A**

1. What political party won the German elections in 1932? _____
2. Who became Chancellor of Germany in 1933? _____
3. Write two of Hitler's aims when he came to power.
 - (a) _____
 - (b) _____
4. Name the first country Hitler took over in 1938. _____
5. What do you think was the major cause of World War II? _____



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World War II raged for five years and many new forms of weapons and ways of fighting were developed. Millions of people, both soldiers and civilians, lost their lives and there were few places in the world that were not affected by the war.

Blitzkrieg

The Germans introduced a new system of warfare called **Blitzkrieg**, which means 'lightning war'.

A blitzkrieg attack commenced with planes bombing airfields, army bases, railways, roads, bridges, fuel depots, power stations and telephone lines. This meant that people in the bombed areas could not call for help, have electric power or get any food or medicine. Before the people had an opportunity to recover from these attacks, tanks arrived in the bombed areas. Troops rushed forward in jeeps, lorries and on foot. Others were parachuted in behind the enemy lines. Britain and France wanted to help Poland but the Blitzkrieg occurred so quickly, there was little they could do. They were not used to preparing their troops to fight in such a short period of time. Consequently, Poland was captured by Hitler's advancing and well-equipped troops.

In April 1940, Hitler's army invaded and conquered Denmark, Holland, Belgium and Norway. By May, the German army had invaded France and the French Government surrendered to Hitler. The Germans now controlled most of Western Europe. Britain alone remained to fight against Germany. It appeared that Hitler was unstoppable. Britain was the last line of defence.



Fact Folder

At the same time as the war was being fought, the Jewish community in Germany and in the Nazi-occupied countries discovered that they were in extreme danger. Hitler and other members of the Nazi party decided that all Jewish men, women and children in Europe should be rounded up, put into special **concentration camps** and put to death in specially built gas chambers. About six million Jews were killed in this way, as well as half a million gypsies and disabled people. Many of these did not even make it to the gas chambers but died of starvation, ill-treatment or disease in the camps. More than 40 concentration camps were built. Well-known camps were located at Auschwitz, Belsen and Dachau. Healthy Jews in the camps were forced to work as slave labourers. The killing of Jews in gas chambers is often called the **Holocaust**.

Winston Churchill was Prime Minister of Britain at this difficult time. He made a number of famous speeches, designed to inspire the British people to fight for their country and make every effort to defeat the Nazis. He knew how fragile Britain's position was and he was also aware of how important it was that Britain did not surrender to Germany.

Here is a quote from one of those speeches:

Five countries in Western Europe remained **neutral** in World War II: Ireland, Spain, Portugal, Sweden and Switzerland.



Winston Churchill

'We shall fight them on the beaches, we shall fight them on the landing grounds, we shall fight them in the fields and in the streets. We shall never surrender.'

Activity B

True or False?

1. The new system of warfare introduced by the Germans was called the Blitzkrieg. _____
2. Soldiers on horseback usually followed the bombings. _____
3. During the early part of the war, the Germans controlled most of Western Europe. _____
4. Churchill was a famous leader in the United States of America. _____
5. France was the last line of defence in Europe against the Nazis. _____
6. World War II lasted for four years. _____

The Blitz



'The Blitz'

In July 1940, the German air force, known as the Luftwaffe, commenced attacking Britain. They no longer targeted only military areas. Aeroplanes, known as bombers, were sent to drop bombs on cities, airports and factories. On one day alone, up to 12 000 German planes dropped bombs on London, Birmingham, Coventry, Glasgow and other cities. The British called this 'The Blitz'. These bombs killed thousands of people and caused a huge amount of damage to houses and factories. The Nazis wanted to cause maximum fear and terror, so many of these raids took place at night.





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The British fought back with attacks, using their air force, the Royal Air Force (RAF). Throughout 1940 and up to May 1942, raids took place almost every night. British and German planes fought each other in the skies over England. This is often called the **Battle of Britain**. Over 40 000 British people were killed during this time. The British used radar to track approaching German planes. This gave them the opportunity to warn the people with sirens so that they could shelter in air raid shelters where they would be safe. The Germans dropped almost 175 000 tonnes of bombs and lost nearly 2600 planes during The Battle of Britain.



British planes



English children outside their bombed home

America enters the war

When Japan attacked its naval base at Pearl Harbour in Hawaii on 7 December 1941, the United States of America (America) decided to join the Allies and fight against the Axis Powers. About 400 Japanese aeroplanes bombed the base for over ninety minutes. Eighteen American ships were sunk and nearly 200 American aeroplanes were destroyed. This action by the Japanese was responsible for changing the course of the war.



Franklin D Roosevelt



Destruction of Pearl Harbour

Up to this point, the majority of Americans did not wish to enter the war. However, following the destruction of Pearl Harbour, opinion changed and people wanted to stop the Axis Powers from conquering more countries. The American President, Franklin D Roosevelt, declared war on the Axis Powers four days after the bombing of Pearl Harbour. This gave the remaining Allies, especially Britain, an enormous boost.



Bombs dropping from an Allied plane onto a German harbour

Between 1942 and 1944, the Allies made thousands of raids over Germany, aiming their bombs specifically at German weapon factories. They also targeted dams which were used to generate electricity. Railways, roads and bridges were also destroyed to prevent Germany from moving troops and supplies.



Cologne and Dresden after air assault by Allied aeroplanes



The cities of Cologne and Dresden in Germany were almost completely flattened as a result of this massive air assault by the Allies.

Unfortunately, over 600 000 German civilians died in these attacks while many German factories were destroyed and the German road and railway systems were made almost impassable.

The Allies decided on a massive attack on the German troops who were stationed at Normandy in France. The attack was arranged for 6 June 1944. This became known as D-Day.

The Allies used 11 000 planes, 9000 ships and three million troops.

The Germans resisted well but by August 1944, the Allies had reached Paris and awaited the order to head for Germany.

By 30 April 1945, the Russians were marching towards Germany from the north-east and the British and Americans were approaching from the south and west.

Hitler realised he had been defeated. He shot himself in his underground bunker, as he was not willing to fall into the hands of the Allies. One week later, on 8 May 1945, the war in Europe ended when the Germans surrendered. This day is now known as VE Day to celebrate Victory in Europe.



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The Allies land in France on D-Day, 6 June 1944



Atomic bomb explodes in Nagasaki, 9 August 1945

The Allies then called on the Japanese to surrender, but they refused to do so.

The Americans had developed a new lethal bomb called the atomic bomb. They decided to drop two of these bombs on Japan in the hope of forcing the Japanese to surrender. The first bomb was dropped on the city of Hiroshima (hir-osh-ee-ma). Nearly 100 000 people were killed in this blast. Thousands more died in the following months and years from their injuries and radiation. Three days later, a second atomic bomb was dropped on the city of Nagasaki (nag-a-sak-e). About 40 000 Japanese died in that blast. The Japanese realised they could not survive against such bombs.

They surrendered on 2 September 1945. World War II was finally over.



World War II caused the deaths of about 60 million people. About 20 million of these were soldiers and 40 million were civilians. Russia alone lost nearly 20 million people, which is about five times the population of Ireland. Millions more lost limbs and were confined to wheelchairs for the remainder of their lives.

When the war was over, people wanted to make sure that such a disaster would never again happen. The United Nations (UN) was set up. The main aim of the United Nations is to keep peace between countries and to try and solve problems by working together to prevent the fighting from beginning.



United Nations flag

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Russia and World War II

Although much of the fighting during World War II took place in Western Europe, Russia played a vital part in the victory of the Allies. In fact, without the help of the Russian army, known as the Red Army, it is unlikely that the Allies would have won the war. However, Russia's involvement in the war began in a peculiar way.



Stalin and Roosevelt

In 1940, Hitler agreed to sign a pact with the Russian leader, Josef Stalin, stating that he would not attack Russia and would divide Poland between the two countries. In June 1941, Hitler broke this pact. He invaded Russia.

In the first week of the German invasion, more than 150 000 Russian soldiers were killed, but the success of the Nazis did not last for long.

They wanted to capture Moscow, but they did not realise the harshness of the Russian winter. Soldiers had to survive rain, snow, wind and temperatures of minus 40 degrees. The Germans failed to reach Moscow and by the spring of 1942, they were forced to retreat. Between 1942 and 1943, a different section of the German army attempted to capture Stalingrad (Volgograd), another important Russian city. This battle lasted for more than five months and almost 300 000 German soldiers were killed. By July 1943, the Germans were again forced to retreat.

This was one of the most important turning points in World War II.

For the next year, the Red Army continued a relentless march towards Germany. In April 1945, the Red Army attacked Berlin, the capital of Germany, from the north-east, just as other Allies reached Berlin, from the south and west.



Red Army soldiers raise the Soviet flag over Berlin, 1945



Russian soldiers advance through the ruins of Stalingrad

The Germans surrendered five days after the Russians invaded Berlin.

Russia suffered more casualties in the war than any other country.

More than eight million Russian soldiers and twelve million Russian civilians died during the war. Many of the civilians died as a result of starvation. Millions of men, women and children were disabled. The country was left in ruins and it was many years before it recovered.



History Quest 6

Key Vocabulary in this Chapter

Dictator: A person who takes total control of a state.

Eliminated: Got rid of.

Annex: To take possession of.

Blitzkrieg: Quick, lightning attacks by bombers during wartime.

Concentration camps: Camps where the Jewish people were confined.

Neutral: Did not take sides in the war.

Radar: A system for tracking aeroplanes (from the phrase radio detection and ranging).

D-Day: American, British and Canadian troops numbering three million with 4000 ships landed on five Normandy beaches on 6 June 1944. This day has become known as D-Day.

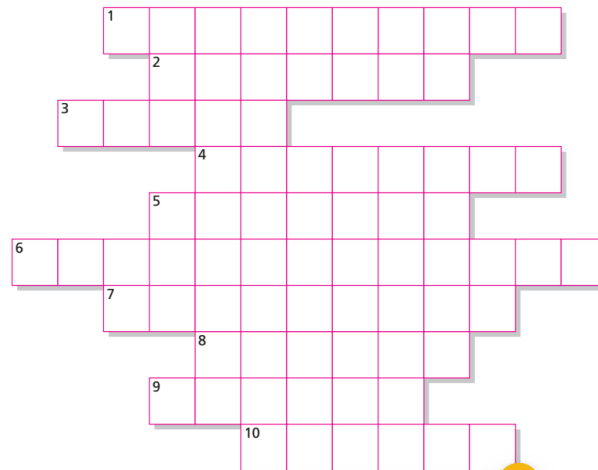
VE Day: Victory in Europe Day.

Activity C

Complete the following word puzzle.

Clues

1. The German word for a 'lightning war'. (10 letters)
2. Many people in Britain built these under their gardens to hide from the bombing. (7 letters)
3. Japanese attacked this harbour in Hawaii, America. (5 letters)
4. D-Day landings were made at _____ in France. (8 letters)
5. A German city, beginning with the letter D, that was almost completely flattened during the war. (7 letters)
6. The camps in which many Jews died. (13 letters)
7. The name given to people who are not members of the armed forces. (9 letters)
8. The bombs which the Americans dropped on Hiroshima and Nagasaki. (6 letters)
9. The surname of the Russian leader during World War II. (6 letters)
10. The German word meaning 'leader'. (6 letters)



Activity D

Use the words in the word box to fill in the gaps in the following story.

Luftwaffe troops Normandy raids Blitzkrieg atomic
concentration camps Nazi Austria Fuhrer Allies bunker
gas Poland Jewish Axis Pearl Harbour Holocaust

In 1933 the _____ party, led by Hitler, came to power in Germany. Hitler called himself the _____ of the German people. He had a dangerous hatred of the _____ people. He ordered the army to build _____ to house the Jews. Millions of Jewish men, women and children were put to death in _____ chambers. This killing of Jewish people became known as the _____.

The first country to be annexed by Hitler was _____. When he invaded _____, Britain and France declared war on Germany. The countries that fought on the side of Britain were called the _____. The countries that fought on the side of Germany became known as the _____ Powers. The Germans introduced a new system of warfare called _____. Many cities in Britain were bombed by the _____, which was the German air force. The United States of America entered the war in December 1941 after their ships in _____ were bombed by the Japanese. Between 1942 and 1944, the Allies made thousands of _____ on German weapon factories, dams, roads, bridges and railways. This prevented the Germans from moving _____ and supplies. In June 1944, the Allies invaded _____ in north-western France with more than 11 000 planes, 9000 ships and three million troops. This invasion became known as D-Day. By early 1945, Hitler realised that the German army was beaten, so he shot himself in his underground _____. The war did not end until September 1945 when the Americans dropped _____ bombs on the Japanese cities of Nagasaki and Hiroshima. The terrible war had lasted for almost 6 years.



History Quest 6

Activity E

The clues will help you to find the words in the wordsearch.

1. He was the dictator who caused World War II.
2. This was the name of the political party that ruled Germany during the war.
3. The name of the German air force.
4. Twelve million of these Russians were killed during World War II.
5. He was the Taoiseach of Ireland during World War II.
6. An atomic bomb was dropped on this Japanese city.
7. Ireland did not take sides in the war. Therefore it remained _____.
8. This is another name for the Russian army.

G	D	E	V	A	L	E	R	A	L	E	R
W	A	B	N	E	U	T	R	A	L	N	H
C	R	E	D	A	R	M	Y	M	X	L	B
N	A	L	U	F	T	W	A	F	F	E	G
H	A	H	I	T	L	E	R	N	A	Z	K
G	O	L	N	A	G	A	S	A	K	I	D
B	L	I	T	Z	H	N	A	Z	I	E	R
L	C	I	V	I	L	I	A	N	S	N	K

Activity F

1. Why do you think Hitler wished to take over Europe?

2. Do you think Ireland should have joined the war against Hitler?

3. Do you think that America should have dropped the atomic bombs?

4. Imagine you were in London during the bombings. In your history copybook, describe what life was like. Mention the fear, narrow escapes and blown-up buildings.
5. Design a poster about war.
 - Colour or paint it.
 - Write a slogan under it.
6. With your partner or class group, discuss the end of the war and the excitement of the people.
 - (a) Imagine that you are writing a headline for the *London News*. What would be your headline?
 - (b) Write in your history copybook a brief account of the end of the war.
7.
 - (a) In your history copybook, write four questions you would like to have asked Hitler.
 - (b) Read these questions to the class.

Suggested Integration

Geography: People and other lands – countries mentioned in this chapter. **Visual Arts:** Paint and draw scenes relating to World War II. **103**

Drama: To explore feelings about World War II. **Reading:** Read the story of Fr Kolbe in your school encyclopaedia.